

INTRODUCTION TO 6th BIBLEBOOK

JOSHUA (before 1367 B.C.)

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A. THE ORIGIN OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA.

1. The name of the book.

The name of the main person 'Joshua' (Hebrew: Jehoshua) is given to the book. Joshua was the leader of Israel and instrument in the hand of the Lord when Israel entered, conquered and possessed the land Canaan. The name 'Joshua' means 'the Lord is salvation'. It means that the salvation and welfare of God's people is completely dependent on the Lord.

2. The writer, the date and the place of writing.

When was the book Joshua written?

The expression "until we had crossed over the Jordan" (5:1) and the statement "Rahab lives among the Israelites to this day" (6:25), indicate that the writer participated in the events described in the book. However, the closing words of the book (24:29-33) could not have been written by Joshua himself. Nevertheless, they were written not long after Joshua had died in 1387 B.C. The time between Joshua's death and the beginning of oppression by a foreign king during the time of the judges cannot have been more than another 20 years¹. The writer must have written the book of Joshua soon after the conquering of Canaan, when Israel was still standing on a spiritual high level and had not yet sunk into idolatry as in the period under the judges. If he was about 35 years old when he crossed the Jordan into Canaan and lived until he was over 75 years old, he could easily have recorded everything written in the book of Joshua as his own experience. Thus, the book Joshua could have been written before 1367 B.C.

Who wrote the book Joshua?

The writer of the book of Joshua is not mentioned. The writer must have stood in close contact with Joshua, because he recorded the revelations that Joshua received from the Lord, his speeches and his commands. He could have written this book at the instruction of Joshua and could have made use of Joshua's own written records (24:26). He could well have been one of the officials, who are often mentioned in the book (24:1). The word *official* in the original language is *writer* (of a document)(shoter). While Joshua only had an indirect influence on the writing of this book, the authority of a Bible book is not based on the fact that some famous person wrote it, but rather that it has been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we conclude that the book of Joshua was written by a very close associate of Joshua.

3. The character of the book.

The historical book Joshua.

The book Joshua is a *historical book*. How should a historical book in the Bible be read and understood? What is the permanent meaning and value of a particular historical passage? What does God want to say to us today in a particular historical passage?

The book of Joshua consists of well interrelated reports of historical events. It contains a continuous report of historical events from God's people Israel entering the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua until his death. *The most important message of this book is that the historical events in the book are part of God's history of salvation.* God was fulfilling his promise to his people (23:14), but also threatened to bring evil if they would violate the covenant (23:15-16). You can only understand these messages when you read the book Joshua in the light of the New Testament revelation.

The Bible is a unity.

The interpretation of a Bible book must reckon with the contents of the book itself and with the light that falls on it from the Bible as a whole. The Bible is an organic unit and every Bible book as well as its parts must be viewed as the members of one body. The Bible is also its own interpreter. The Old Testament has its supplement and fulfilment in the New Testament and therefore must be read in the light of the New Testament.

The meaning of history in the Bible.

When we read the Old Testament historical books, we must be guided by a good insight into the meaning of *history* as recorded in the Bible. History in the Bible has a *holy character*. *It is a history set apart from secular history, because God is the Maker of salvation history and the Evaluator of secular history recorded in the Bible! History in the Bible is a part of God's special revelation of himself and his thoughts to us, not only through words, but also through facts, events and people.* History in the Bible is prophecy, not only through words, but also through events. History in the Bible is *God's salvation history*: it reveals God's plan of salvation. Thus, God reveals himself, his thoughts and will through the historical books in the Bible on the one hand and through the books of the prophets on the other hand.

¹ Judges 3:8

That is why the Jews call the historical books from Joshua to Esther 'the early prophets' and the prophetic books from Isaiah to Malachi 'the later prophets'.

The Old Testament types and shadows.

The historical books of the Old Testament were inspired by the Holy Spirit and included in the canon of the Bible not just to make known to us the history of the nation Israel. *The historical books can only be understood correctly, when 'Israel' is seen as a type of Jesus Christ and the New Testament Church*². A *type* is a person, thing or event that serves as an illustration. Important people like Melchizedek, Moses, David and Solomon have a typical character in the Old Testament. The history of Israel has the character of a *shadow* and an *example*: It is not the history of a nation among other nations, but the history of God's people during the Old Testament period.

This Old Testament period was a *divinely ordained period of time*. The Bible knows only two such divinely ordained periods of time: the Old Testament period and the New Testament period. The history recorded in the Bible really happened, but *points to another, higher reality*. The historical record must first be understood as good as possible as *history* and as a united story, even if it has clearly distinguishable parts. Therefore, the interpreter may not try to find a deeper meaning in each separate verse of a historical book, but he must give an account of the meaning of the whole historical book as a whole, and of certain parts that contain important events. *Christians should only ascribe typological significance to a historical event or person when another part of the Bible treats it as a type*.

B. THE DIVISION AND MAIN CONTENTS OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA.

The theme of Joshua: *The historical events in Joshua point to the higher New Testament reality.*

The book of Joshua may be divided into two main parts as follows:

1. Joshua chapters 1 to 12. The conquest of the Promised Land.

2. Joshua chapters 13 to 24. The occupation of the Promised Land.

C. THE MESSIAH, JESUS CHRIST, IN THE BOOK OF JOSHUA.

Jesus Christ is the Saviour; the One who fulfils what is prophesied in the book Joshua.

▪ *The name Joshua and the name Jesus.*

'Joshua' in the Hebrew Old Testament means exactly the same as 'Jesus' in the Greek New Testament. The name 'Joshua' means 'the LORD is salvation'. It signifies that the salvation and the well-being of God's Old Testament people was completely dependent on God. However, not Joshua (the type), but Jesus (the antitype) would be the real Saviour of God's people³!

▪ *The destiny of Gods people.*

Joshua brought God's people into the Promised Land, but he did not bring God's people into the final 'rest of God'⁴! *The Promised Land was only 'a shadow' (type) of the real destiny: the final rest on the new earth (antitype) which Jesus Christ would bring. The Sabbath-rest is a term for heaven.* When Christians have finished their life and work on earth, they will enter God's rest in heaven and rest from their work on earth, just like God rested from his creation work on earth⁵.

Ultimately Jesus brings God's people (both the believers in Israel during the Old Testament period and the believers in the Church during the New Testament period) into 'the rest of God' (the salvation of their souls)⁶. People can only enter this rest of God by faith in the gospel and obedience to God during their lives on earth⁷. Not Joshua, but Jesus is 'the Author of their salvation'⁸. He is the One who begins and who perfects the Christian faith⁹.

D. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA.

The main messages of the book Joshua are the deeper meanings of the historical events. *The historical events in the book Joshua point to another, higher reality. Only when the book Joshua is read in the light of the New Testament, can these messages be understood.*

1. The deeper meaning of the crossing of the river Jordan (Joshua 3-4).

God promised that he would be present and would do amazing things. He would go ahead of his people into the river Jordan.

² Isaiah 49:3

³ Matthew 1:21

⁴ Hebrews 4:9-11

⁵ Revelation 14:13

⁶ 1 Peter 1:9-12

⁷ Hebrews 4:1-7

⁸ Hebrews 2:10

⁹ Hebrews 12:2; cf. Philippians 1:6

Although the Jordan was at flood stage, God cut the river off so that the water stopped flowing down, but piled up in a heap a great distance away. Thus the people of God were able to cross the Jordan on firm and dry ground. This was a divine miracle.

The prophet Micah reminds the people of God that the crossing of the Jordan had a special meaning. In Micah 6:5 he says, “Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord.” What was the deeper meaning of the crossing of the Jordan which people should remember?

This historical event followed four other historical events with meaning:

- *The first Passover* symbolised the death of the Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ, in the place of believers, so that they may be saved from eternal death¹⁰.
- *The Exodus* from Egypt symbolised salvation, ‘being brought out from slavery’ of sin, which people experience in the world¹¹.
- *The crossing of the Red Sea*, ‘a baptism in the cloud and in the sea’, symbolised the dying of the old man together with Christ¹².
- *The forty years journey through the desert* symbolised the people of God, ‘as aliens and strangers on earth’ on their way to the Promised Land of rest¹³.
- Therefore, *the crossing of the Jordan* symbolises ‘entering God’s rest’, the crossing of physical death and the grave into eternal life in heaven¹⁴.

The events in the Bible are not the same as the events in secular history. *These events in the Bible picture God’s salvation history*. They picture the beginning of the new life in Christ, the journey of the Church of Christ through this world, the death and resurrection of Christians and entrance to the new earth.

2. The deeper meaning of the ark going ahead of Israel into the Jordan (Joshua 3:3-4).

*The ark symbolised the presence of the Living God in their midst*¹⁵. The floodwaters of the river Jordan prevented Israel from crossing into the Promised Land. But the ark of the covenant that was carried by the priests went ahead and was the first to descend into the river Jordan. It cut off these floodwaters and enabled the people of God to cross into the Promised Land. This historical event points to a deeper meaning: ‘The descending of the ark into the river Jordan’ *symbolised the work of Jesus Christ, who by humbling himself to die for the sins of his people*¹⁶, *conquered death and opened the way into heaven*.

Thus, *these historical events recorded in the Old Testament are prophecies concerning Jesus Christ and the salvation history of the Church of Christ*¹⁷. Just as Israel had to look towards the ark of the covenant as they crossed the river Jordan into earthly Canaan, likewise we must look to Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection as we pass through this world and finally through our death and resurrection into the heavenly Canaan. What happened with Israel in the Old Testament period, *the divinely ordained period of shadows*, will in a spiritual sense be repeated and fulfilled with the Christian Church in the New Testament period, *the divinely ordained period of realities*¹⁸. Joshua chapter 3 therefore promises that physical death has a definite purpose. Physical death enables Christians to take possession of their eternal inheritance in the new heaven and the new earth.

3. The deeper meaning of the annihilation of the original nations living in Canaan (Joshua 6).

The destruction of these nations, as described in the book of Joshua, was intended to be carried out stringently. Israel was not very consistent in this and later regretted it (17:13). In Joshua chapter 6, Jericho falls and is completely destroyed. Joshua 6:21 says, “They devoted the city to the Lord and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it - men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.” In Joshua chapter 8, all the people who lived in Ai were destroyed and the city was made a permanent heap of ruins. Joshua chapter 9 and 10 describe how Israel destroyed the cities in the south and in the north of Canaan. Joshua 10:22-27 describes how the five Amorite kings were captured. Joshua summoned his army commanders to put their feet on the necks of these kings. He said that this is what the Lord was going to do with all their enemies. He struck and killed these kings, hung them on five trees and finally threw them into a cave.

We may ask the question, “*Was all this not needless cruelty?*” The book of Joshua does not answer this question. But The Canaanite nations were descendants of Canaan, the son of Ham. They were very wicked and served idols. In Genesis 15:13-16 God said to Abraham when he was about 99 years old (2068 B.C.), “In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for *the sin of the Amorites*¹⁹ *has not yet reached its full measure.*”

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 5:7-8

¹¹ Exodus 20:2

¹² 1 Corinthians 10:1-2

¹³ Hebrews 11:13

¹⁴ Hebrews 4:8-11

¹⁵ Joshua 3:10; 1 Chronicles 13:6

¹⁶ Philippians 2:6-8

¹⁷ Cp. Numbers 21:6-9 and John 3:14-15

¹⁸ Hebrews 10:1-4

¹⁹ Leviticus 18:27 says, “All these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled.” Numbers 21:31 says, “Israel settled in the land of the Amorites.”

God warned them in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorra, but they did not change a bit. Leviticus chapter 18 describes the sinful practices and detestable customs of the nations in the land of Canaan. They committed incest, adultery, homosexuality and bestiality²⁰. Deuteronomy 12:29-31 and 18:9-13 describe how these nations did all kinds of detestable things which the Lord hates. They even burned their children alive in the fire as sacrifices to their gods. It is clear that God had tolerated the sins and wickedness of these nations for a very long time, and that by the time Israel entered Canaan (1407 B.C.), the sins of these nations had reached its full measure.

As the righteous Judge of the universe, God used the *flood* to judge the whole world²¹. He used *burning sulphur* to overthrow the cities of Sodom and Gomorra²². He used the *army* of Israel as his instrument to judge the godless Canaanites (1387 B.C.)(10:40; 11:14,20). God himself decreed to annihilate these nations and to give their land as a possession to Israel. He did this, not because Israel deserved it, but because it was God's will. The New Testament clearly teaches that it was God himself who drove these nations out of Canaan²³. Therefore, *the annihilation of the Canaanite nations must be regarded as a judgement of God*. It was a holy work, exercising the wrath of God over wicked nations. Israel was only God's instrument.

Later God used Shalmaneser²⁴ of the Assyrian Empire as "the rod of his anger"²⁵ to judge the northern kingdom of Israel (721 B.C.). He used Nebuchadnezzar²⁶ of the Babylonian Empire to judge the southern kingdom of Judah (586 B.C.). He used Cyrus of the Medes and Persians as "his shepherd"²⁷ and as "his bird of prey"²⁸ to judge the Babylonian Empire (539 B.C.). He used Alexander of the Greeks as "the goat" to judge the Medo-Persian Empire as "the ram"²⁹ (331 B.C.). And he used the Romans to judge the Greek-Syrian Empire (146/31 B.C.).

Thus, *Israel functioned as a type for the Christian Church*. The Church of Jesus Christ is called to show itself as *the Militant Church* within this present world. Christians fight, not with physical weapons, but with spiritual weapons³⁰.

As far as possible, the Christian Church should cut off all the remains of sin in her own midst³¹ and should fight against all the powers of darkness around her³². The Christians must realise that if they fail to do this, they will be excluded from inheriting the new earth. The successes and victories of Israel in the Old Testament period serve to encourage the Church in the New Testament period. Although the enemies of the Church are many and very strong, it will nevertheless triumph over them. However, the Church must remain faithful to Jesus Christ, keep herself from being polluted by the wicked world and fight in the power of faith only.

The Church may *never* fight holy wars or physically kill their opponents! According to Matthew 5, Christians may never take revenge on their opponents. They may not even react in sinful anger or in insults. Instead, they must do all they can to get reconciled to their opponents. They should not even resist evil people in their persecution of Christians. But the persecutors of Christians must be warned. 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 teaches that at the Second Coming of Christ, God will judge the unrighteousness of people who opposed Christ and persecuted the Christians.

4. The deeper meaning of the division of the land (Joshua 13-21).

Joshua chapter 13 to 21 describes the division of the land of Canaan. By casting lots, God sovereignly determined which part of the land each tribe received³³. This prevented jealousy and squabbling. God allotted certain portions of land to individuals like Caleb and Joshua³⁴. The message is that God has assigned a place for people to live on this earth and a special inheritance on the new earth. Acts 17:26 says, "From one man he (God) made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live." And Colossians 1:12-13 says that God has also qualified Christians to share in the inheritance of the Kingdom of Christ.³⁵

5. The book of Joshua is the bridge to the rest of the Old Testament.

There are seven resemblances between Joshua and Acts:

The book of Joshua forms the bridge between the five books of Moses (Genesis to Deuteronomy) and the rest of the Old Testament. Likewise the book of Acts forms the bridge between the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and the rest of the New Testament.

²⁰ Leviticus 18:6,20,22,23

²¹ Genesis 6

²² Genesis 19:24

²³ Acts 7:45; 13:19

²⁴ 2 Kings 17

²⁵ Isaiah 10:5-6

²⁶ 2 Kings 25

²⁷ Isaiah 44:28

²⁸ Isaiah 46:11

²⁹ Daniel 8:1-8

³⁰ 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:10-18

³¹ 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

³² Ephesians 6:10-18

³³ Joshua 14:2

³⁴ Joshua 14:6-15; Joshua 19:49-51

³⁵ Colossians 1:12-13

Take possession of the land. Although the sin of Achan (chapter 7) and the sin of Ananias and Sapphira³⁶ show that the people of God are vulnerable to sin, yet with the power of God/God's Spirit they are invincible!

The people of God in the Old Testament and in the New Testament were as it were at the top of their spiritual life and were therefore able to do great things in God's power. Joshua was commanded to take possession of the whole land (1:3). The apostles were commanded to be Christ's witnesses to the ends of the earth³⁷.

Be strong and receive power. Joshua was encouraged to be strong and courageous (1:9). The apostles received power from the Holy Spirit to be Christ's witnesses³⁸.

Great acts and great miracles. In the book Joshua God performed great acts: he led his people across the Jordan and caused the fall of Jericho (chapter 3-4). In the book of Acts God performed even greater miracles: he healed the sick, raised the dead and turned the world upside down³⁹.

God extends his people over the whole land. In the book Joshua God's people were extended over the whole land. In the book of Acts God's people were extended over the whole Roman Empire.

God leads his people to the Promised Land. The message of the book Joshua is that God Himself fights for his people and leads them in triumph to take possession of the Promised Land (23:3,10). The message of the book of Acts is that Jesus continues the work which he began in the world before his ascension into heaven through his Holy Spirit, his Word and his Church⁴⁰. He leads his people to their destination: first to the ends of this present earth⁴¹ and finally to the new earth⁴².

God fulfils his promise to Israel. Joshua said: "Not one of all the LORD's good promises to the house of Israel failed: everyone was fulfilled" (21:45; 23:14)! All God's promises are being fulfilled during the New Testament period. The apostle Paul said: "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ⁴³." "What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children⁴⁴."

³⁶ Acts 5

³⁷ Acts 1:8

³⁸ Acts 1:8

³⁹ Acts 17:6

⁴⁰ Acts 1:1; Hebrews 1:1-2

⁴¹ Matthew 24:14; Acts 1:8; Romans 8:31

⁴² Acts 3:21; 2 Peter 3:13

⁴³ 2 Corinthians 1:20

⁴⁴ Acts 13:32.